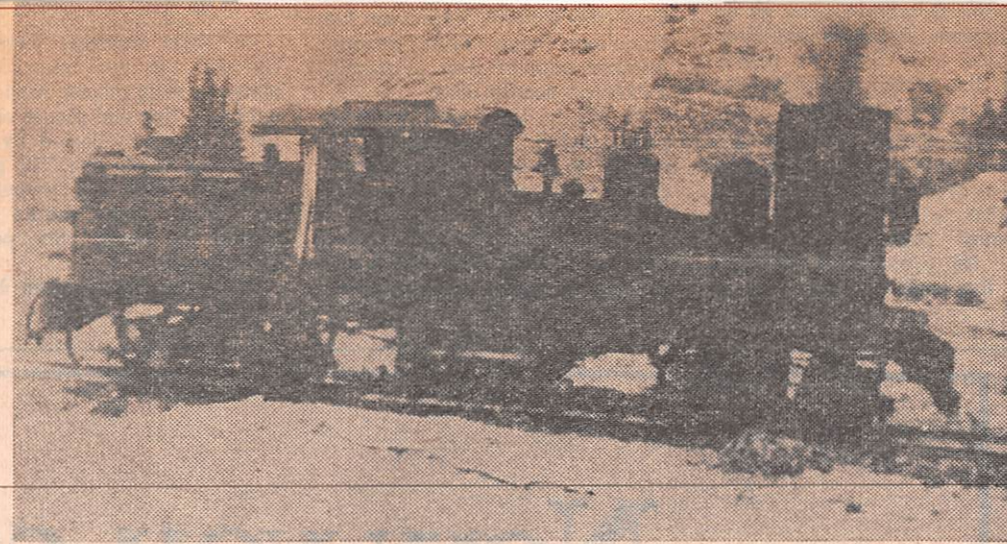


# When Alta's Cliffs Echoed The Sound Of Train Whistles

by Larry James

1967



Little Cottonwood transportation Co. Shay locomotive at the end of the line in Alta. The Columbus Mine dump in background is now the site of a ski chalet.

ALTA, in the mountains southeast of Salt Lake City, is today known far and wide as a skiers' paradise, but 50 years ago the scene was different. Instead of ski lifts and lodges and hundreds of cars, the visitor would have seen mine buildings, ore bins, aerial tramways, and a Shay steam locomotive pulling a string of tiny ore cars beneath the towering cliffs of Mt. Superior.

Railroading in Little Cottonwood canyon was one part of the 80 years of Alta's mining history. Two different steam railroads were also built between Wasatch, at the mouth of the canyon, and Midvale.

RAILROADING in the canyon began a few years after the discovery of silver at Alta in 1865. By 1871 the high mountain community was the largest mining camp in Utah Territory and a need developed for cheap transportation of ore to the smelters in the valley below. Local men began building a railroad and by 1873 the Wasatch and Jordan Valley line had completed a narrow gauge track to the granite quarry at the mouth of the canyon. The first train over the

line carried Brigham Young and other guests of honor.

Soon, the Company's little Dawson and Bailey steam locomotives were making daily runs to Wasatch — but the ore still had to be hauled by mule down the steep grade from Alta.

THREE YEARS later the company began constructing the long-awaited extension of the line to Alta. The grade — the same used by the present highway — was cut into the north side of the canyon, with Chinese work crews finishing the work within a year. Snow sheds were built over the tracks at places to allow winter operations.

But still the climb was too steep for locomotives so mules pulled the empty ore cars up to Alta, and full ones were allowed to roll back to Wasatch by gravity, with the mule-skinner controlling the hand brakes — a dangerous and exciting job.

This company failed in 1881 as the Alta boom faded and the line was purchased by the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railway, which operated the steam and mule railroads for several years. In 1890 the line from Sandy to Wasatch was converted to standard gauge,

while regular runs to Alta on the mule tramway were discontinued. A few years later, scheduled runs to Wasatch also ceased and by 1902 the Wasatch branch was largely nonexistent. Local residents uprooted large sections of the rusting track, using the ties for fence posts and firewood.

WHEN SEVERAL large mines were reopened early in the 20th century, there were visions of a new railroad to the camp, but they did not materialize until J. G. Jacobs, incorporated the Salt Lake and Alta Railroad Co., and relaid the old standard gauge line between Midvale and Wasatch, completing reconstruction on Nov. 19, 1913.

The new company purchased a new Shay locomotive. The Shay, work-horse of mountain railroads, was a geared locomotive that could climb steep grades. Three vertical steam cylinders, lined up along the right-hand side of the boiler, turned a shaft geared to the driving wheel axles.

THE FOLLOWING year, discovery of a large ore body stimulated a new mining boom, and another company was formed to

rebuild the narrow gauge track to Alta. The Little Cottonwood Transportation Co. began work in July, 1917 and the new tracks reached the South Hecla Mine in November, 1918.

There was no turn-around track at Alta, so loaded trains were eased down the canyon with the locomotive running in reverse. At Wasatch the ore was dumped into bins above the Salt Lake and Alta tracks for transfer into standard gauge cars.

But both standard and narrow gauge roads had problems and proved unprofitable. A local mining journal reported that "Hardly a week goes by without a wrecked trainload of ore . . . due to the poor condition of the tracks." On the Little Cottonwood narrow gauge the grade was so steep that a train would slide downgrade even with all brakes locked. Winter operation was impossible.

PERHAPS TYPICAL of the problems encountered by the railroad is this incident which occurred in the spring of 1920.

Little Cottonwood Transportation Co. locomotive Number Two was steaming up the canyon alone. Two foreigners, hop-

ing to find work at Alta, were riding the catwalk along the boiler.

Suddenly the engine began to slip backwards down the tracks. The brakes failed and the runaway rapidly gained speed.

The engineer and firemen, realizing the situation was hopeless, told their "passengers" to jump, and then made the leap to safety themselves. The two men on the catwalk apparently were more scared of the jump than what could possibly happen if they kept their places, so they remained on the locomotive.

The Jitney (see below) was coming down the grade from Alta and overtook the engineer and firemen who were hurrying afoot along the track. The Jitney picked up the two men and continued on down the canyon to Tanner's Flat where they found the wreck of the locomotive. The two passengers lay crushed beneath the boiler.

Once again the Alta mining boom faded and steam service on the narrow gauge was discontinued in 1921. The two remaining Shays were sold, one to the Pioche Pacific Railroad in Nevada. This locomotive is

now on display at the Last Frontier Hotel in Las Vegas.

IN ADDITION to steam engines, several unusual gasoline-powered vehicles were used on the narrow gauge. The Despain family operated a converted truck, equipped with rail wheels, as a passenger and mail carrier. This truck, known as the Jitney, made daily runs to Alta. And George Watson, an Alta mine operator, afterwards sentimentally known as the "Mayor of Alta," attempted to use a larger, enclosed sight-seeing car to haul tourists to the camp. This vehicle proved unwieldy and unpopular — passengers to Alta wanted to be able to see out, and if necessary, jump off.

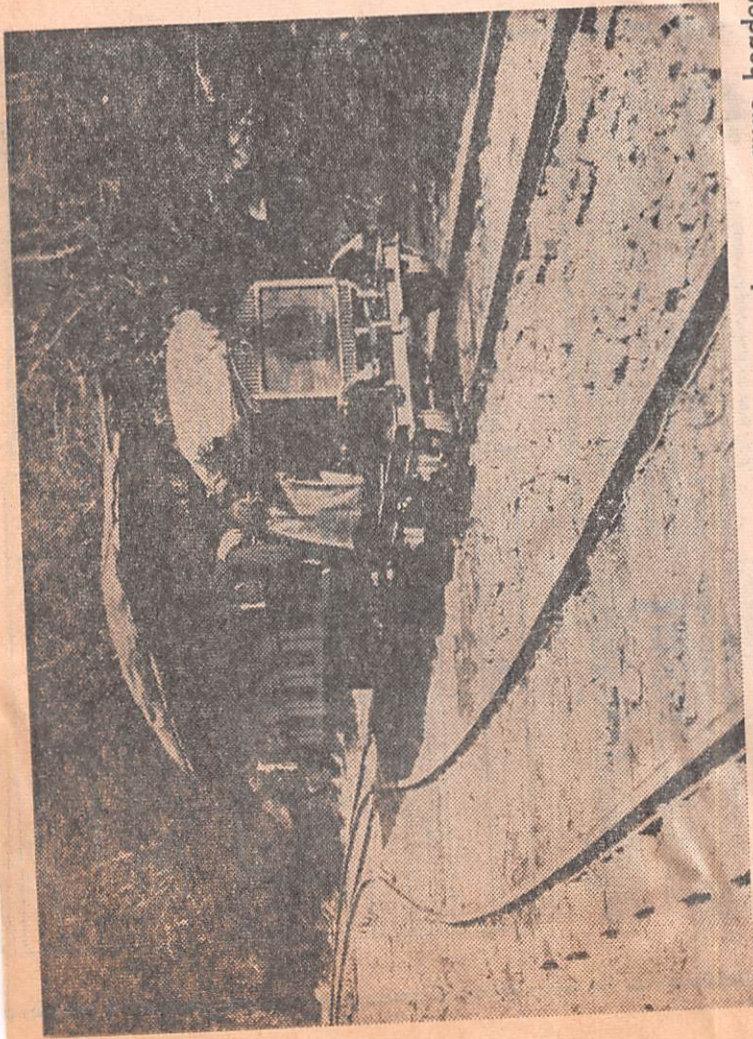
LAST VEHICLE to continue using the narrow gauge was the Jitney which continued its daily runs until June 2, 1928 when the little truck was completely wrecked after it went out of control and jumped the tracks. Alta mine owner John P. Clays was fatally injured in this mishap.

In 1934 the tracks in the canyon were cut up for scrap, two years later the Denver and Rio Grande discontinued runs to Wasatch and in 1965 the last rails of the old Salt Lake and Alta, running along Center St. in Midvale were removed.

Today, few traces remain of the railroads that once ran between Midvale and Alta. A few old ties and railroad cuts in the fields north of 9400 South St. show where the standard gauge tracks once ran, and only a few sections of the rock wall built along the old mule tramway in 1876, remain to tell of the Alta narrow gauge.

THE WHISTLE of a steam locomotive has long been gone from the canyon, but skiers will have to agree that the old grade makes a fine highway.

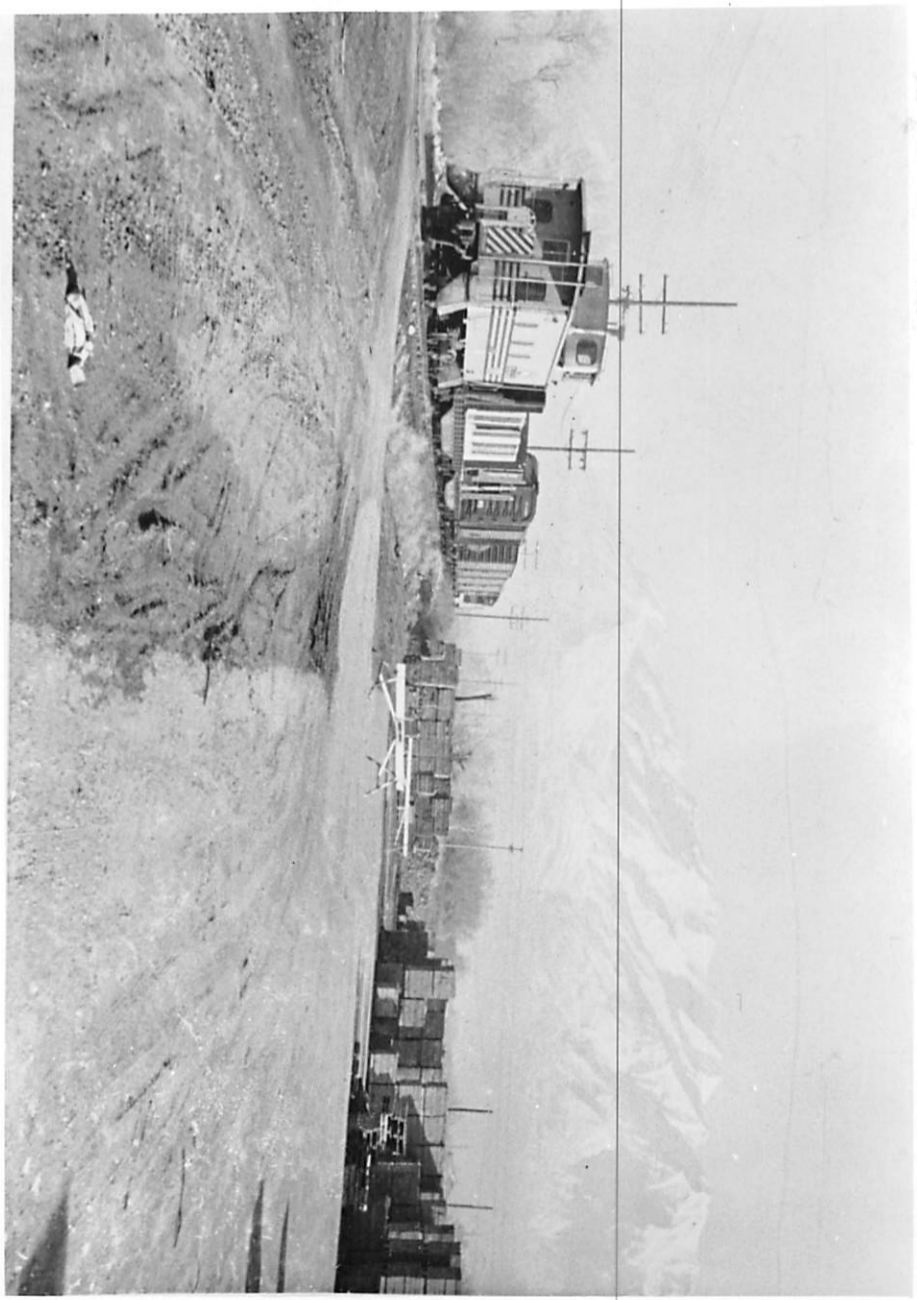
Aug 1967



The Jitney, a converted truck used on the Little Cottonwood narrow gauge, headed for Alta with a load of passengers and mail. The vehicle made the run each day.  
Salt Lake City, Utah, August 27, 1967

Editor's note: The author, who has made an extensive study of the Alta railroads is anxious to get in touch with anyone who remembers them, and is particularly interested in obtaining photographs of the Salt Lake and Alta Locomotive. He may be reached at 5050 Cottonwood Ln., Salt Lake City.

Nov 1967

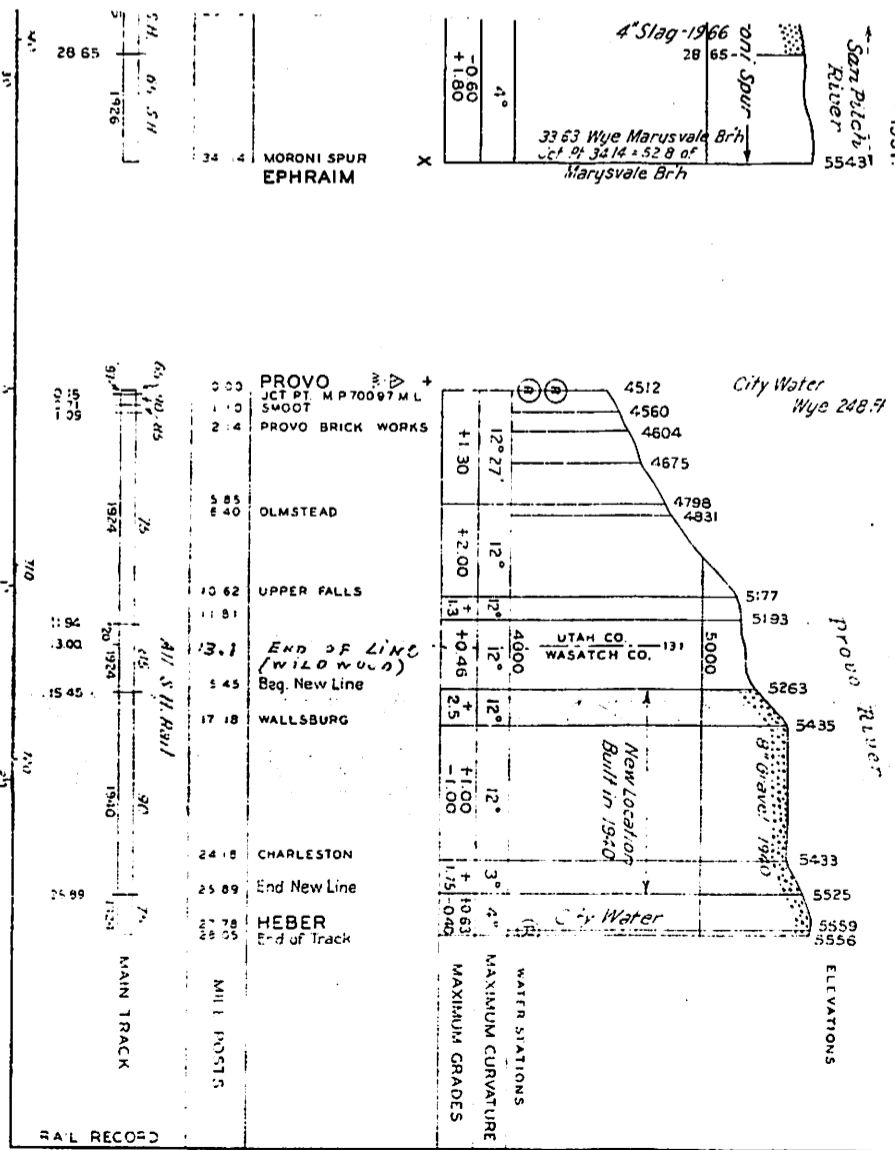


Jan 1968

ANCH  
28.05 MILES  
PROVO CANYON BRANCH

Built S.G. in 1899.  
Upper 15 Miles purchased in 1900  
from Utah Eastern Ry. Co.

oved in 1917 and 18.  
" 1925.  
" 1945.  
to U.P.R. in 1948.  
oved in 1948.  
" 1951.



# Cattle Drives Still Take Place From Strawberry Into Utah Valley

By KATHRYN D. GROESBECK

Eight sturdy "cowboys" of Utah County were still reliving the experiences of another old-time cattle drive made this fall from Strawberry to the Spanish Fork Canyon corral.

Making the drive were Selby Dixon of Payson, Don Oberg of Genola, Ray Dixon, Don Wride and Ralph Balzly of Benjamin, and George Milner, Allen Cornaby and Harold "Spanky" Hansen of Spanish Fork. Each gave a helping hand at chuck wagon duties along the way.

In past years, Max Depew of Payson has accompanied the drive.

It probably was the biggest drive ever made over the 50-mile trail, for over 1700 cattle with calves were brought out of the Strawberry area for about 50 different owners. Weather was just right and cool enough for easy travel for the animals.

Only the most experienced and best trailers and riders go on this drive, for the cattle that have rustled for themselves all summer can be ornery as sin when they want to be and as fast on their feet as any horse. Just ask anyone of the drivers. He can tell you there is plenty of trouble afoot when a cow breaks from the herd to find her calf.

## Brisk Clip

Generally the drivers spread out as they move along, some closing in near the animals that lead the way, some riding on opposite sides of the herd, and others continuing to trail as they haze the cattle along at a brisk clip, but not so fast as to get the herd overly tired.

Gathering the hundreds of animals to begin the drive is often a mammoth undertaking by itself. But once the move begins, the long line slowly streaks south-westward across Strawberry to the first night's bedding down corral. A second night finds the herd at a second corral, still in the high country. By the third night the men and their valued animals reach the Williams's corral in Indian Canyon, there to rest again. Up at daylight or shortly before, all are soon on the move again towards Thistle the fourth day. On the fifth day the two-mile long string of cattle is a sight to behold as the animals trail down Spanish Fork Canyon to their last bedding down corral.

## Auto Problem

Automobile traffic in the canyon sometimes proves a prob-

WEDNESDAY, NOV. 13, 1963  
Utah County, Utah

lem for the cowhands. But this particular group of riders handles it by sending out a flagman to direct automobiles away from the herd.

Some travelers find interest in just the herd itself and many stop their cars to take pictures of the big rangy animals trailing along the highway.

As soon as the herd reaches the bedding ground near the mouth of Spanish Fork Canyon, the big job is over for the cowhands. The final work is left for the following day when the owners of the cattle, some of them the drivers themselves, cut out their own stock. Some of these men have long taken a part in trailing the cattle out from Strawberry, their day at such times being from just before daylight until dark, when both cattle and men welcome some much needed rest.

## Texas Drives

Though the cattle drives from Strawberry have always held fascination for the Utah County "cowboys," following the trail has been no easier at times than it was in 1867, when the great cattle drives began in Texas. There millions of cattle roamed wild on the open range after the Civil War. But once the half-breed trader named Jesse Chisholm had marked the way north along an old Indian trail, twenty years were to see the longhorns being gathered in to follow deep wagon ruts from Texas to Kansas, to the Dakotas and Montana, and even to Utah.

Then, almost suddenly, the railroads brought an end to the great drives. Besides, "bob-wire" so criss-crossed the range in time that the big drives were impossible. Yet during the great trail drive period, more than 10 million head of cattle passed over the big trails from Texas to market with Dodge City and Abilene at one end of the trail and San Antonio and Fort Worth on the other, they being, of course, the best known of the cattle towns.

These centers were often places of unrestrained delight and men like Wild Bill Hickok, Luke Short, and John Wesley Hardin began to make history, with gunfighting and rustlers part of the early drama.

## Hit the Trail

When Texas trail crews reached market towns, they made their presence felt, got rid of their wages in a glorious style, and then hit the trail

again for a long nine-hundred-mile ride back.

Nothing like those old time trail drives from Texas to Kansas can ever occur again.

But the cowhand who joins the drive over the mountains from Strawberry to the Spanish Fork corral grounds enjoys his work, looks forward to it with pleasure; thrills at the sight

of a two-mile long string of cattle coming down the canyon highway; minds not his turn at the chuck wagon nor the chill of the night air in camp nor the trouble that comes when a cow gets "spooked" and makes a break. And he resolves, that, come next year, he will be on hand ready to make another drive.

Daily Herald

5



CATTLE STILL TRAIL down Spanish Fork Canyon from Strawberry each fall, although nothing like the cattle drives of old.

# New Life For Old Chapel

CORINNE, Box Elder County — New life is being pumped into the 98-year-old United Methodist Church house in Corinne, believed to be the oldest Protestant church building in Utah.

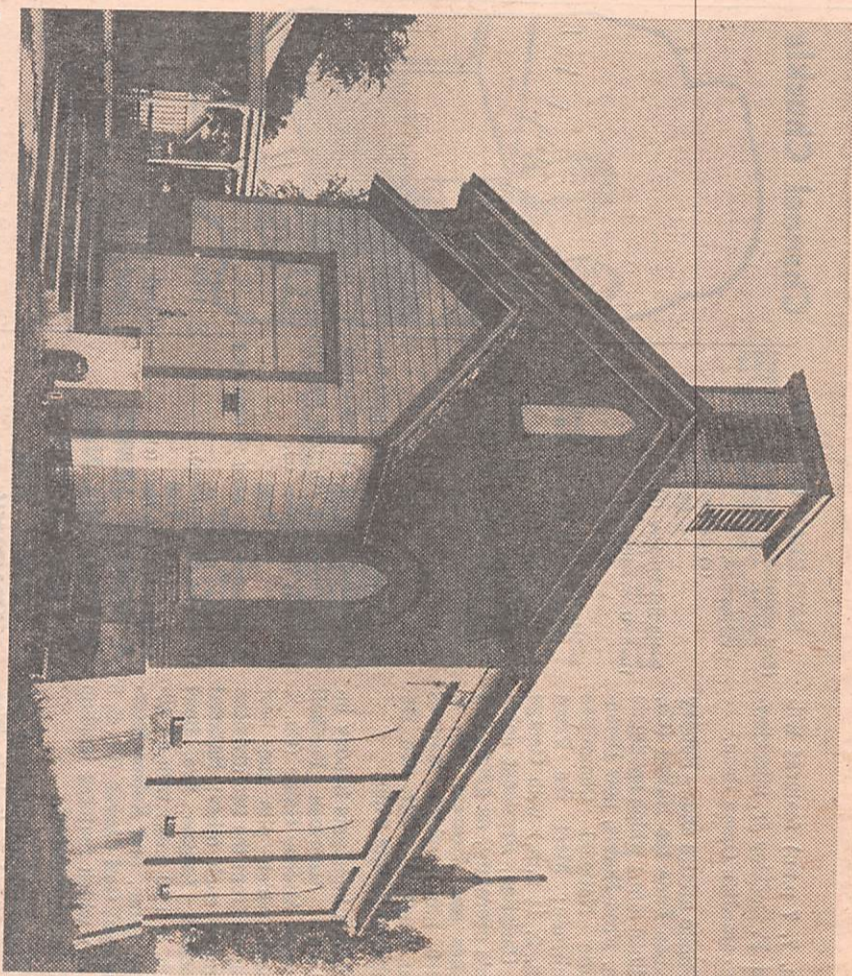
A restoration that ultimately will cost \$10,000 should be completed by May 10 to coincide with the Golden Spike Centennial.

The Rev. William D. Davis, pastor of the Aldersgate United Methodist Church, Brigham City, and the Community United Methodist Church, Tremonton, said the old chapel will be opened as a museum and visitor center and staffed by church members from the area.

The brick and wooden building was dedicated in September, 1870, by Corinne residents and used until 1958. It was abandoned when the United Methodist Church could no longer justify keeping a congregation in Corinne.

A committee, headed by the Rev. Mr. Davis, was named to restore the building. He said any formal ceremony noting the building's opening might be delayed until 1970 when the 100th year of Methodism in Utah will be celebrated.

Members of the finance committee for the restoration project include the Rev. Gene Velken, pastor of Christ United Methodist Church, Salt Lake City; Dr. Robert Hudson and Dr. Robert Run-



Restoration of United Methodist Church in Corinne should be completed in May.

nels, both of Salt Lake City, and the Rev. William R. Peters, district superintendent of the United Methodist Church.

The restoration project was begun last year by 13 young church members under the direction of the Rev. Mr.

Davis and Mrs. Carol Jensen, director of youth activities, First United Methodist Church, Ogden.

The church's Rocky Mountain Conference donated \$300 toward the project and the youths paid their own travel and food expenses.

They painted the outside of the building, replaced some mortar in the outside brick, cleaned the inside, revarnished the original birch pews and cleaned out the bell tower.

The Rev. Mr. Davis said a

bell cast by Henry Cooper Co. in Boston in 1852 still hangs in the tower.

Also found were a hand-pump organ that still works, a communion set, an antique high-boy, an old coal stove and a table.

The youths worked from a 1914 photograph and matched paint chips with the original paint. The outside is painted yellow and resembles the color of Union Pacific Railroad buildings and boxcars.

Since August other projects included putting on a new roof, tearing up the sub-flooring, boarding up the windows to prevent vandalism and inspecting the foundation to make certain it is still in good condition.

Future projects include installing a furnace, replacing 12 floor joists, replacing the sub-flooring and the old top flooring, plastering in some places, installing the windows and hanging wallpaper.

The pastor said Mrs. Charlotte Ferry, Tremonton, is 94 years old and the oldest living member of the church. She came to Corinne in 1900 and was the church organist for many years. She also was the treasurer when the building was closed in 1958.

"I would appreciate any church or civic group volunteering to help on the restoration project," the pastor said. Anyone interested should contact him.

# Birth Of The 'Sin Towns'

*Des News 24 Feb 1969*

By DOROTHY O. REA  
Deseret News Staff Writer

## Fifth of a Series

You plunge across the western country with the builders of the Union Pacific Railroad. Your life as a journalist is filled with excitement. It is your job to tell the story of scathing Indian attacks and to tell what's going on in the towns which will go down in history as "Hell on Wheels."

First "sin town" to grow up at the Union Pacific railhead is Ft. Kearny on the Platte River. You visit the second "Hell on Wheels" — North Platte, Neb.

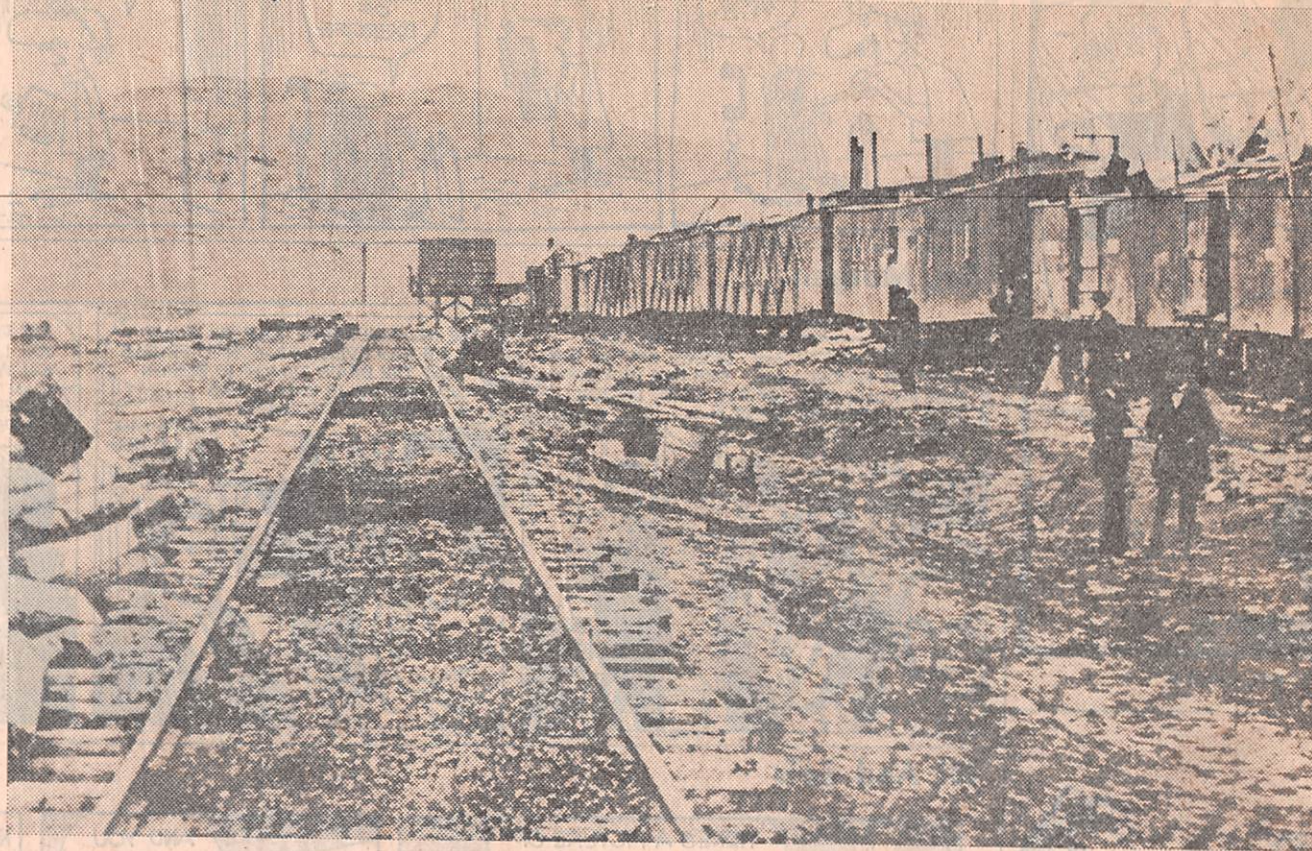
It is the icy winter of 1866-67 when you first see the portable town. Clapboard buildings brought in sections on flatcars are thrown up to make a strange silhouette against the snowy landscape.

## CURLING SMOKE

You see smoke curling from the railroad buildings and from hotels, saloons, gaming houses and shoddy dwellings. Great stoves fight a round-the-clock battle against one of the worst winters in history.

One of your contemporaries, Henry M. Stanley, a young Britisher, writes of his visit: "Every gambler in the Union seems to have steered his course for North Platte, and every known game under the sun is played here. The days of Pike's Peak and California are revived.

"Every house is a saloon and every saloon is a gambling den. Revolvers are in great requisition. . . .



Jack and Dan Casement's boarding train, near end of track, signals the birth of a new town.

with giving Army protection to the isolated parties of surveyors and workmen of Union Pacific. He has succeeded Gen. Phillip St. George Cooke.

#### INTERVIEW CROWDS

You write about the freight haulers. You interview travelers who come to North Platte to make connection with stages to Denver. You talk with railroad construction workers bent on spending spree in the clapboard buildings.

You are stranded with the others when winter blizzards halt all traffic into North Platte. When the thaw comes, you write of the twisting floods. "Samuel Reed has assigned crews to grade as far west as 25 miles beyond Julesburg. But his troubles aren't as much ahead of him as behind. Floods have undermined tracks and washed out roadbeds. Harvest hit are miles between North Platte

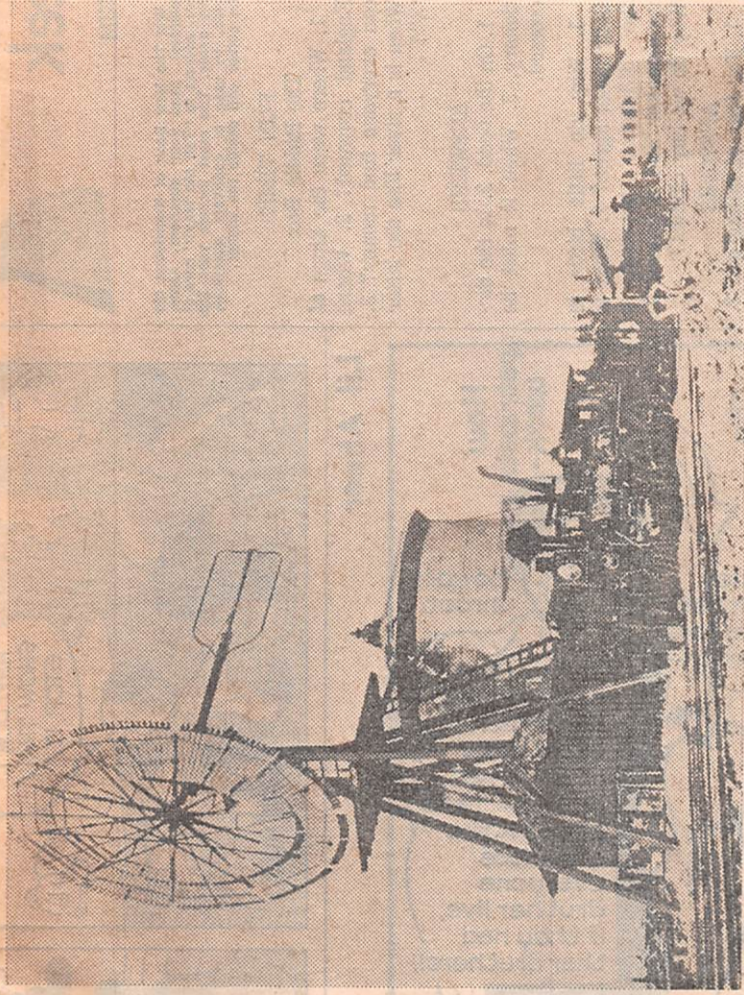
See RAILS on Page B-9

#### PERFECT BABEL

"On account of the immense freighting done to Idaho, Montana, Utah, Dakota and Colorado, hundreds of bull-whackers walk about and turn the one street into a perfect Babel.

"Old gamblers who revelled in the glorious days of flush times in the gold districts, declare that this town outstrips all yet."

You talk with Gen. Christopher C. Augur, a young and vigorous commander charged



Water tank, windmill dominate Laramie, one of the portable towns.